

INTNLREL 160
Summer Session 2026
Tue/Thu 12:00–2:00
Classroom: TBD

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United Nations Peacekeeping

Course Description:

This seminar is devoted to an examination of United Nations peacekeeping, from its inception in 1956 in the wake of the Suez Crisis to its increasingly important role today as an enforcer of political stability in sub-Saharan Africa. We will trace the development of "classic" peacekeeping as it evolved during the Cold War, the rise and fall of so-called "second-generation" peacekeeping—also called "peace enforcement"—in the 1990s in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda; and the emergence more recently of a muscular form of peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa, notably in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Students should come away with a firm grasp of the historical trajectory of U.N. peacekeeping methods and the evolving arguments of its proponents and critics over the years. More broadly, students will learn the basic history of the United Nations since 1945 and the fundamentals of the United Nations Charter, especially with respect to the use of force and the sovereignty of member states. And students will become familiar with primary U.N. documents, principally in the form of Security Council resolutions and landmark reports. A running theme of the course is the often contentious relationship between the United States and the United Nations, not least when it comes to conceptualizing, funding, and fielding peacekeeping operations.

Each session is structured around the discussion of assigned readings. Students are expected to complete the readings before class and to come to class prepared to participate in discussions. The instructor will occasionally begin a session with brief introductory remarks (no more than 10 minutes) to provide historical context on one or another topic.

Course Readings:

The following required book is available at the Bookstore:

Stanley Meisler, *United Nations: A History* (Grove Press, 2nd ed., 2011)

Other readings will be posted on Canvas or distributed by email.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will become familiar with the fundamental assumptions behind, and the circumstances of, the founding of the United Nations in 1945, and its evolution to the present day. Students will be expected to master the key chapters and articles of the United Nations Charter, especially as they relate to peacekeeping.

Students will learn how to read a variety of sources with a critical eye, including a history of the United Nations; a memoir by one of its key officials who served as the head of peacekeeping under seven secretaries-general; UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions; official UN reports on peacekeeping, and statistical and other data available on the UN's website devoted to peacekeeping operations, past and present.

Students will learn how a peacekeeping mission is launched, and how assessments are made about its successes and failures, by researching a particular operation and presenting their findings to the class.

Students should come away with a basic understanding of the "culture" around U.N. peacekeeping: which countries are the leading troop contributors and why, which of those countries are apt to oppose the use of force by peacekeepers, and why, despite Americans' low regard for peacekeeping, it continues to play an essential role in international affairs.

Course Requirements:

The course is a seminar, which means that **class attendance and participation** are especially important, counting for as much as 30% of the final grade. A central component of the course is a close reading and discussion of the assigned texts. Each student will make an in-class presentation about a U.N. peacekeeping mission of their choice during the final week of the course.

There will be **two response papers and a final paper**: one of the two response papers will be an analysis (2-3 pages; worth 20% of the final grade) of a U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing a peacekeeping operation; the final paper (6 pages; worth 40% of the final grade), based solely on the course readings, requires students to convey a sense of the trajectory of U.N. peacekeeping from its origins in the 1950s to its latest variations in Africa, and invites students to suggest guidelines for improving future peacekeeping operations.

Absences: Attendance is mandatory. Absences may be excused for family emergencies or illness, with advance notice if possible. To make up an excused absence, students will submit a 3-page double-spaced reflection, responding to the readings discussed in the missed class. Unexcused absences will be counted against your final grade.

Participation: Students are expected to participate in the course by doing assigned readings in advance; by coming to class informed and ready for discussion; by showing appropriate respect to the instructor and fellow students, even in disagreement; and by demonstrating a mature engagement with the themes of the course, regardless of their prior interest. Students demonstrate participation in class by asking questions, responding to prompts by the instructor, and engaging with their classmates' ideas.

Course Schedule & Readings

Week One

Tue: Introduction to the course

Thu: League of Nations and World War II

Readings TBD

Week Two

Tue: Origins and early years of the UN

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 1–35

Thu: Dag Hammarskjöld and the rise of peacekeeping

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 36–114

United Nations Charter, Chapters VI & VII. Available at:
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

Week Three

Tue: Congo and the Fate of UNEF

Urquhart, *A Life in Peace and War*, 145–216

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 115–152

UNSC resolutions on Congo TBD

Thu: Cyprus, the Six-Day War, Kurt Waldheim, UNESCO

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 153–238

UNSC resolution on United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus TBD

Week Four

Tue: End of the Cold War, rise of the "new" peacekeeping

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 239–277

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) [Canvas]

Thu: Peace Enforcement and the conflict in Bosnia

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 278–293

UNSC resolutions on UNPROFOR, the NATO no-fly zone, UN safe areas TBD

Week Five

Tue: The Somalia debacle, 1992–1993

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 294–311

Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, "Somalia and the Future of Humanitarian

Intervention," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1996 [Canvas]

UNSC resolutions on UNOSOM II and "Black Hawk Down" TBD

Thu: Bosnia and the Srebrenica Massacre of 1995

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 311–333

"The fall of Srebrenica: an assessment," in "The Srebrenica Report," November 15, 1999, pp. 102–109.

Week Six

Tue: Rwanda

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 334–344
Guy Lawson, "Sorrows of a Hero," *The New York Review of Books*, May 26, 2005; available on Canvas.
Samantha Power, "A Hero of Our Times," *The New York Review of Books*, November 18, 2004; available on Canvas.

Thu: Assessing peacekeeping and peace enforcement in the 1990s (I)

Giandomenico Picco, "The U.N. and the Use of Force," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept/Oct 1994
John Hillen, "Picking up the U.N.'s Peacekeeping Pieces," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1998
United Nations Assistance Mission in Cambodia (UNTAC), SC res. TBD
Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 345–354

Week Seven

Tue: Assessing peacekeeping and peace enforcement in the 1990s (II)

Michael Hirsh, "The Fall Guy: Washington's Self-Defeating Assault on the U.N." *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1999
Max Boot, "Paving the Road to Hell: The Failure of U.N. Peacekeeping," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2000
The Brahimi Report, August 21, 2000, executive summary [Canvas]

Thu: Peacekeeping in the 21st Century: Darfur and beyond

Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 355–390
<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en>

Week Eight

Tue: Peacekeeping in Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan since 2007; the end of UNAMID (Darfur)

Readings TBD

Thu: Looking Ahead

The New Humanitarian, "The Future of Peacekeeping"

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/tags/future-peacekeeping>

International Crisis Group, "Fresh Thinking About Peace Operations at the UN"

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/fresh-thinking-about-peace-operations-un>